A LETTER to a *Friend*, Containing ſome QUÆRIES about the *New Commiſſion* for making Alterations in the *Liturgy*, *Canons*, &c. of the Church of *England*.

SIR,

IN Your laſt you ſeem much concerned about the New Commiſſion, and deſire my Opinion of it: I am very unfit to reſolve your Doubts in this matter, having many of my own; which I ſhall reduce into ſome Quæries, hoping that you may have opportunity of conſulting with ſome of the Commiſſioners, who may be able to give you a more ſatisfactory Anſwer than I can.

Firſt, *Concerning the Nature of theſe intended Alterations.*

Q. I. Whether there be any *Neceſſity* of ſuch Alterations *in the Liturgy*, or as ſome ſay *of it*; (Whatever may be pretended as to Canons and Eccleſiaſtical Courts:) if there be any, for the Satisfaction of the Members of our Church, who generally believe there is none, why is not this Neceſſity made appear, and the reaſons to the contrary confuted? If there be none, enquire whether it be for the Reputation and Eſtabliſhment of the Church, or for the encreaſe of Reverence and Devotion in the People to be ſo frequently meditating unneceſſary Alterations.

Q. II. If theſe Alterations be not pretended to be neceſſary, enquire what the fitneſs and expediency of them is? Whether they are intended for the ſake of the Church, or, for the ſatisfaction of Diſſenters, or to ſerve both theſe ends together?

1. If for the ſake of the Church, ſhould it not be firſt enquired whether the Church deſire it, and what Alterations ſhe deſires? Ought ſhe not to be conſulted in ſuch matters as are intended for her advantage? Should not the Convocation then have firſt met and conſidered, whether any Alterations at this time were expedient, before the Commiſſioners had troubled themſelves to make ſuch Alterations, and become bound in honour to defend them? Or is it for the Peace and Unity and Edification of the

Church, for ſome few aſſuming men to alter the Eſtabliſhed Worſhip, to make it comply with their own private conceits, or to ſerve their own private ends?

2. If for the ſake of the Church, why ſhould any thing be altered which hath the general Approbation of the true Members of the Church? Why ſhould ſuch Ceremonies be taken away, or which is much worſe, left indifferent, which they approved as uſeful to the external Decency and ſolemnity of Worſhip? Why ſhould ſuch Prayers and forms of Worſhip be altered, which they find ſuch great helps to Devotion, that they deſire no material change, and believe they cannot be altered for the better by any meer humane Compoſitions.

3. If it be for the ſake of the Church, will our Commiſſioners keep their eye upon the Primitive pattern which was the original Rule of our Reformation? If they can alter our Worſhip and Diſcipline into a nearer and more exact Conformity to the ancient Primitive and Apoſtolick Churches; this I grant would be for the advantage of the Church; but ask them, whether it will be for the advantage of the Church to change the ancient Rules and Forms of Worſhip for ſome new Modern Inventions? How ſhall we juſtifie our ſelves againſt the charge of Novelty and Innovation, if we reform away all the remains and characters of a Primitive and Apoſtolick Church.

2. If theſe Alterations be intended for the ſatisfaction of Diſſenters, and to Unite them in the Communion of our Church.

Q. 1. Do they know what will ſatisfie Diſſenters? Whether they find any greater inclinations in them now to return to our Communion, then they have formerly had? or whether after the fruitleſs tryals by the Commiſſioners at the *Savoy* in 61. and at the L. K. *Bridgman*'s, where ſome of theſe Gentlemen were concerned, it be expedient to make a new and more dangerous experiment.

2. Whether it be poſſible in the nature of the thing, to give ſuch ſatisfaction to Diſſenters as ſhall reſtore them to the Communion of the Church without deſtroying the fundamental Conſtitution of the Church of *England*? As for inſtance,

Can any alterations in our Collects and Prayers (while we retain

a Form) ſatisfie thoſe who declare againſt all forms of Prayer as a quenching of the Spirit? and then it is not altering the Liturgy, but taking it away, that muſt ſatisfie Diſſenters.

And not to multiply Quæries, will the diſſenting Preachers, who have been Ordained by Schiſmatical Presbyters, ſubmit to Epiſcopal Ordinations? or if they will not, will the People come into the Church without their Preachers? or if the Commiſſioners ſhould think fit to admit them as Presbyters of the Church without a Solemn Ordination, is it not a ſubverſion of the Conſtitution, not only of the Church of *England*, but of the Catholick Church? and are they ſure that the Members of the Church of *England* will own ſuch Presbyters?

3. Inquire you whether it be reaſonable at this time to make ſuch alterations in our Worſhip in favour of Diſſenters, without reaſonable aſſurance of gaining them to our Communion? and whether the temper and practiſes of our Diſſenters at this time give any ſuch aſſurance? eſpecially if the ſtory of *Northampton* be true, that like *Novatianus* of old, they oblige their Communicants to vow or ſwear upon the Sacrament that they will never return to the Communion of the Church of *England*, which is ſaid alſo to be a general practice.

After this I ſuppoſe it will be needleſs to ſay, that theſe alterations can be intended both for the advantage of the Church and ſatisfaction of Diſſenters, ſince from what has been ſaid it ſeems impracticable to make ſuch Alterations as ſhall ſatisfie Diſſenters, and not give juſt ſcandal to the Members of our Church, and therefore here you are to inquire,

I. Whether they ought not to have as tender a regard to the Members of our own Church, as to Diſſenters? As for inſtance: if many of our Communion will be offended to ſee others receive the Lord's Supper ſitting, and it may be through the weakneſs of humane nature may Forſake our Communion for it, whether it be reaſonable to drive theſe Men from our Communion out of meer hope to gain worſe men in the room of them?

II. Ask if ſuch alterations ſhould make a Schiſm in the Church, would it not prove of more fatal conſequence than this Preſent Schiſm?

Second, *Some Queries concerning the Commiſſion and Commiſſioners.*

Q. I. Whether ſince the K. himſelf, beſides his Solemn Oath at his Coronation, has ſo often declared his reſolution to maintain the Church of *England* as by Law eſtabliſhed, it be not more probable ſome of theſe Commiſſioners have procured this Commiſſion from the K. to make ſuch alterations, then that it proceeded from the K.'s own inclination?

II. Whether the known Character of ſome of the Leading men in this Commiſſion be not reaſon enough to ſuſpect the event? Whether men who conformed with difficulty themſelves, or upon Principles which Wiſe men fore-ſaw would deſtroy the Church in time, who have a Latitude to conform to a Church *de facto*, which has power on its ſide, and to conceal their own inclinations till it is time to ſhow them, are not likely to do the Church of *England* a good turn when opportunity ſerves, and which perhaps they imagine now they have?

III. Whether when the Houſe of Commons addreſſed to the King for a Convocation, it was not to prevent ſuch a Commiſſion as this? which was then moved in the Houſe of Lords by an eminent Perſon in this Commiſſion, and a zealous promoter of it.

IV. Whether there was any ſuch haſt of altering the beſt conſtituted Church in the World (which honourable title ſome of theſe Commiſſioners in a good mood have in their Writings beſtowed upon the Church of *England*) that they could not expect the calling of a Convocation, but muſt have theſe alterations ready prepared for them by Commiſſioners?

V. Whether the effect of this will not be to check all freedom of debate in the Convocation, when theſe alterations ſhall be propoſed to them as the judgment of the Commiſſioners, who will themſelves be Men of the greateſt Authority in the Convocation? and who will be ſo hardy as to oppoſe what the Commiſſioners have done? and thus (as it may prove) our Church may be changed and altered and transformed by Nine men, who may have tenderneſs and moderation enough to part with any thing but their Church-preferments: And what an impoſition would this be thought

thought on the Two Houſes of Parliament, were as many Perſons of as great Authority and Intereſt, and who had the diſpoſal of State-preferments in their hands, commiſſionated to prepare all Bills for their approbation?

VI. It ſhould be Inquired whether the Convocation, when it meets, will have Authority to offer any new alterations, or to do any thing but approve what is ſo offered? For the Convocation can go no farther than the King gives them authority, and that is expreſſed in the Commiſſion only to *approve*.

VII. If the Convocation have any authority, it ſhould be conſidered of what dangerous conſequence it may be, ſhould the Convocation diſſent from the Commiſſioners? And whether to prevent this, it may not occaſion as much cloſeting for the choice of Convocation men, as was lately practiced to pack a Houſe of Commons?

Third, *Some Queries concerning the fitneſs of the time for ſuch alterations.*

Q. I. Can it be thought a convenient time for ſuch alterations as theſe, when the A. B. the Metropolitan of all *England*, and the head of the Convocation, and ſeveral other Biſhops (not to mention thoſe of the inferiour Clergy) who are as eminent for a prudent and well tempered zeal for the Church of *England*, as for their conſtant loyalty, are now under ſuſpenſion? Will not ſome be apt to queſtion the Eccleſiaſtical Authority of ſuch proceedings, when the Convocation is without its proper head, and deprived of the advice and counſel of ſo many principal members of it? Will not others be apt to ſuſpect, that this time is choſe on purpoſe, becauſe the A. B. and thoſe other Biſhops are now ſuſpended, whoſe preſence and authority in the Convocation they were afraid of, as ſure and faſt friends to the Church? And if they are afraid of thoſe reverend Perſons who had before declared their readineſs (in their Addreſs to K. *J.* againſt their publiſhing his Declaration for Liberty of Conſcience) to come to ſuch a temper with reference to Diſſenters, as ſhall be thought fit by a Parliament and Convocation, it is very ſuſpicious that they intend ſomething very unreaſonable, which they feared would not paſs a free Convocation, when thoſe reverend and judicious Prelates were preſent.

Q. II. Can

Q. II. Can it be thought a proper ſeaſon to make any alterations in a well conſtituted and eſtabliſhed Church, when the paſſions of men are in ſuch a vehement fermentation? when there are ſuch ſtruglings between the different parties in religion, and ſuch different intereſts of State to ſerve by them? Can we expect ſuch fair dealing, ſuch ſedate and unbiaſſed councels, as (if ever) are neceſſary to alter or new-lay the foundations of a Church? The reigns of *Conſtantius* and *Valens* will ſatisfie any man what may be expected from Councels and Convocations, when reaſons of State muſt govern, and the late example of *Scotland* gives us no great reaſon to expect much better.

Q. III. Is it a proper time to make alterations, and unſettle the foundations of the Church, when there are ſo many powerful Enemies, who watch an opportunity to pull it down? I think it is not prudent, when a City is beſieged to make a breach in the Walls, tho' it be to mend them: The Church of *England* will ſtand firm if we let it alone, but under a pretence of mending it, it will be an eaſie matter, when its ſtrength and intereſt is divided, to raze its foundations.

For a Concluſion, Sir, what the Parliament will think of this affair, I will not pretend to gueſs, but I ſhall only add, that upon the whole matter there ſeems to be great reaſon to have a jealous eye upon this Commiſſion, and I hope the friends of the Church of *England*, in both Houſes of Parliament, will be upon their guard; eſpecially it behoves the Clergy to be very careful what Members they chooſe for the Convocation, which is not now as formerly a matter of meer Ceremony and Form, ſince the preſent and future Safety of the Church depends on it, and it is ſeldom ſeen that there are any conſiderable Innovations in the Church, but have a proportionable influence on the State.

I am, *Sir*, Yours.

FINIS.